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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2012  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 4601  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2405  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2270  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 2849  
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 3155  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001618

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN; DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMEN CITIZENS' VIEWS ON WHETHER OR NOT TO VOTE

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: December 15-18, poloff asked Ashgabat and Mary city residents about their participation in the December 14 Mejlis elections, to get a sense of how residents perceived the first major election since President Berdimuhamedov took office. The individuals surveyed still generally viewed voting as more of a duty to country than a means to insure their representation in government. For them, there was no connection between electing representatives and having someone represent their interests in central government. For this and other reasons, everyone who commented on the election was apathetic about the process and its expected results. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) A middle-aged Ashgabat resident said she voted, although she had not seen any information about the candidates. She asked election workers at the poll if they had biographical information on the candidates in her district, but they did not have such information inside the polling place. (NOTE: Large boards with information about the 18 candidates running in Ashgabat's election districts were seen in various places around the city, but were not outside of every polling station. All candidate information was in the Turkmen language only. END NOTE.) She voted for the person who seemed the most distinguished in his previous position, which she could read on the ballot. She saw only a handful of ballots in the transparent ballot box where she voted.

¶4. (SBU) A female resident in her twenties said she received an invitation to vote, but did not vote, and was not visited by election officials seeking her vote. Her reasoning was that she hadn't known who her previous deputy had been, and he had never introduced himself to district residents or addressed issues specific to her neighborhood in Khitrovka. She also noted that when any of the candidates spoke on Turkmen television, their comments were always non-specific in nature and generally referred to the President's stated reform plans.

¶5. (SBU) Another woman in her thirties said she had received an invitation as well as a call from election officials in her district, asking her to vote, and she

decided to accommodate them. She said she went to her polling station around 3:00 p.m., and was the only voter there. She said the election officials were very attentive and pleased with her visit, and treated her like a "rare guest," offering her coffee or tea and reviewing the new voting instructions with her. She noted that there were only a small number of ballots in the box when she put her ballot in. A male resident in his early thirties said he did not vote because he had no interest in the elections. He was certain that his parents had taken his passport and voted for him, because they "always did their duty."

16. (SBU) A non-ethnic Turkmen woman in her forties said she had not voted, and expressed certainty that others in her apartment building also did not vote. She indicated that, based on numerous conversations with fellow residents, and on the fact that no one had known anything about the previous Mejlis deputy that had been elected by their district, no one believed that a new deputy would play a more significant role in addressing issues of special interest to their district. She did not receive a knock on her door from district election officials seeking to collect her vote at home. In contrast, she said that in early 2007, she and her fellow residents had voted in the presidential election, because they had shared some optimism that the election represented concrete change for the country. In addition, being a dual Russian citizen, she had gone to the Russian Embassy several months ago to vote in the Russian presidential election. She said she had done so because she had seen a lot of coverage on the candidates on Russian television, and because she felt that both the election and her vote mattered.

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17. (SBU) A non-ethnic Turkmen in his sixties said he and his family and their friends and neighbors had ignored the election completely. Although he had served as an election commissioner in the early 1990s, he did not think that the elections would bring any real change in those areas where it was needed. He expressed frustration that he had seen no biographic or platform information in the Russian language for any of the candidates. (NOTE: Information on the candidates was published only in provincial newspapers in the Turkmen language. Post knows of no venue where candidate information was published in other languages. END NOTE.) He pointed to the December 18 edition of Neytralniy Turkmenistan, and said he knew more about the Bulgarian President than he did about any of the Mejlis candidates. (NOTE: The newspaper often publishes an official biography when heads of state visit. END NOTE.) Further, he doubted that any non-ethnic Turkmen citizens would be elected.

18. (SBU) A taxi driver in the provincial center of Mary said he had voted for his whole family because he is the head of the household and that is their tradition. When asked about his understanding of the duties and responsibilities of a Mejlis deputy, he confessed that he did not know, nor did he know the length of a deputy's term. He also did not know whether a deputy elected in his district would represent the interests and concerns of district residents. He had not seen any biographic information about the candidates in his district, so he looked at the addresses of the candidates listed on the ballot, and voted for the candidate who lived closest to him.

19. (SBU) COMMENT: All the individuals that poloff talked with expressed apathy about the elections. In the absence of confidence that the elections would have even the potential to represent some form of change, most of these residents found other things to do on election day. END COMMENT.

MILES